

[Jack Robert Grigsby]

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Folkstuff And Folkways - Range Lore 3,120 Words

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by

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Pioneer Experiences and

Cowboy Tales of Early Days. REAL COUNTY, DISTRICT #10

JACK ROBERT GRIGSBY

Leakey, Texas.

"I was born in Tyler, Texas, August 26, 1854, coming to this country in November, 1870. I was about sixteen years old when I came here. I was raised an orphan. I don't ever remember seeing my mother, and my father died when I was six or seven years old. After that I lived first one place and another till I came out here.

"I started work on a ranch when I first got to this country, working for Will Pruitt. I just lived in the woods, for there were very few people her here at that time. I worked for Mr. Pruitt about six years, just working for my board and clothes, and it wasn't many clothes either.

"I went part of the way up the trail to Oklahoma, twice with stuff for Will Pruitt. But he would always turn me back at Red River. He knew that I had a half brother living on up in Oklahoma and I always thought he did this so I wouldn't find my brother and stay with him, for he wanted me to work for him. I would come all the way back from Red River alone. Sometimes I would meet up with herds on the way and sometimes I would ride all the way back without seeing anyone.

"I have had all kinds of ups and downs in the cattle buisness. Once we took a bunch of cattle to the old Woodhull ranch out south of Spofford. Part of the herd belonged to Mr. Furness. C-12 [????]

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He had come up here and bought them up, and we got twenty-five cents a head for all we delivered, and furnished ourselves. But we had to pay for all we lost. One night we had

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camped about where Cline is now and had put the herd in a corner of a pasture for the night. We were herding them too, but along in the night something scared them and they run through all three of those wire fences. As we would turn them from one string they would go into another. But we only lost two. One broke it's shoulder and one got away. It was a steer that belonged to old Man Vogel and three years later , Millard Parkerson caught him and sold him for old Man Vogel. But the one that got its shoulder broke didn't cost us anything for it belonged to one of the boys in the bunch.

“Our boss wanted to get there with the cattle looking good. So after we crossed Turkey Creek, we heard the train coming and he asked us to take the cattle a mile or so away from the track so the train wouldn't stampede 'em. Well, we all had cattle in the outfit and we made it up to hold them right to the track. So we took our slickers from behind our saddles and whipped the herd right up to the track. We had to do some riding for about two miles, for those cattle really did run. But we stayed with 'em. The boss sure got red but it didn't do him any good.

“The next day we got to the ranch and was going down on a creek to camp, and one of the boys roped the pack horseman and he went to pitching and scattered skilletts, frying pans, coffee pots and all our ub grub everywhere. But we got everything back but our grub. So we went up to the house and told Mr. Furness what had happened. He told us to come on up to the house and stay. So we helped him brand out his cattle, and he give us enough grub to get back home.

“Yes, we always used a pack horse to carry our grub for we worked 3 in this rough country and there were no roads, so we had no use for a a chuck wagon. Except one time when we made a trip up on the divide above Leakey. Well, there was no road and the wagon broke down. We had gotten ahead with the herd, so some of the boys went back to see what was wrong and to get some corn from the wagon to feed the horses. The man saw a light out across the country and came back and told us it was Indians. So we had to get out and round up the horses. We built a brush pen to put them in and guarded them all

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night. The next morning we had gotten breakfast and started to eat. But it was always the custom then, when the cowboys were eating, for someone to keep watch for Indians. Well, one of the boys got up to look and saw a big bunch of men coming. He says, 'Boys, here they come!' But it turned out to be soldiers and they had seen us and thought we were Indians. So the boss got up and hollered at them to wait and the officer in charge come on up to the camp. We had killed a beef the evening before, so we gave them part of that and they gave us about twenty-five pounds of coffee.

“One time Joe Pan Pelt came to work with our outfit down here about Rio Frio. Well, we always turned all the horses loose at night except one or two we kept to ride after the others next morning. We never cared what we kept up to ride — just anything, no matter how [?] they were. The boys always took it turn about going after the horses in the morning, so it came Joe's time to get the horses. It was a cold, frosty morning and he said he didn't want to get on the horse. But I told him yes, he must go. So he got on the horse and he began pitching and finally turned a somersault with him. He got up and said he couldn't ride the horse again. But I told him we had those horses there to ride and if he didn't ride him I couldn't keep him for I couldn't afford to keep a hand that could not ride the horses. So he got on him again and that time he 4 rode him.

“Joe Collins used to come out in this country and buy fat cattle and take them to New Orleans and ship them from there. I have seen him ride into cow camp with a morral (nose bag) full of gold [?] and go off and leave it there maybe all night and no one ever bothered it. I guess if someone had taken it he would have just been killed and that would have been all there would have been to it. There wasn't any court. Uvalde was the nearest post-office.

“Old Man Schwartz used to come to the cow camps with his hack peddling drygoods and lots of times he would stay all night. He always went prepared to camp, for them days you couldn't always make it to a house for the night. But he would always sell something to the cowboys, such as gloves and if they didn't have the money they got them just the same.

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And I don't believe those cowboys ever beat him out of a quarter. He was sure a fine old man. I thought a lot of him.

"When I first commenced work for myself I had some awful mean horses. I traded for the meanest ones I could get, so the boys wouldn't ride 'em when I was gone. I had one I only rode every three days. Well, he was so mean I would have to tie him to a tree and beat him up before I could get a bridle on him, for he sure would fight.

"I broke a horse down here once for Mart Pruitt. He finally traded him to Calvin Bowles. The horse was getting tender-footed so I met Calvin one day and told him his horse needed shoeing. He said yes, but he was too mean to shoe. But the old blacksmith in Leahey come out and said he could handle him. Well, they brought the horse down and the old blacksmith fooled around him a little while and finally dropped the rope. I said, 'Don't do that; he'll run off.' He told me to just let him alone he would handle him. So he went in and got his nails and hammer and horseshoes and 5 and put the shoes on him and the horse never moved. I don't know what he did to the horse for after that he was just as mean to kick anyone else as he ever was.

"Yes, times are quite different now to what they used to be. I remember when Old Man Hanson come in here and taken up a preemption of a hundred and sixty acres. Hatten Elms come along and wanted to trade him out of it. Elms asked him what he would take for it and he said, 'Two cows and calves,' which meant about eight dollars for a cow and calf. Well, they traded for about a week, and then Elms backed out. So you can imagine about what land was worth then.

"Once the Indians come into the country and was stealing horses. Well, we heard of them and the settlers got together and took their trail down here about Rio Frio. We followed them on across the Seco to the Sabinal Canyon and on to Frio Town, down by Old Man Westfall's ranch, which was a big cow ranch. And when we crossed the Frio near where Loma Vista is now, we had run out of food and were sure hungry. We hadn't had anything

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to eat for several days but a little coffee. There didn't seem to be any stock in that country then. But we finally met a Mexican sheep herder with a herd of sheep and asked him for one. He said we would have to go see the boss. We didn't have time to fool around hunting the boss. So Joe Van-Pelt jumped off his horse and shot at a big old mutton and killed two. We took them on down to a little creek and cooked them and the eighteen of us ate every bit of those two sheep.

“The Indians killed nineteen people before they reached the Rio Grande. Well, we went on for a day or two without overtaking them and some of the men got discouraged and kept dropping out till there was only five of us left. We had appointed Henry Patterson as captain. So he decided it was best to go back to Uvalde and wire Lieutenant Bullis 6 for help so he met us here with his Seminole Indian soldiers and we took up the trail again and followed it on to the Rio Grande. But they had already gone across. We could see men riding back and forth and we were satisfied it was these Indians, but we were not allowed to go after them. They killed one man by the name of Byrd and about five of his men who was herding sheep for him. Mr. Byrd was in his buggy when the Indians overtaken him and after they killed him, they taken everything he had in the buggy and his buggy harness. They cut the leather harness up in little pieces and scattered it along the way. Of course it was of no value to them. But we found it as we followed the trail. They had also gone by the Mount Woodward ranch and killed two or three men there. We didn't see anyone as we passed the ranch. We wasn't bothered about seeing people — we was just following that Indian trail.

“Another time we followed a bunch of Indians over on Dry Frio. They had killed a man by the name of Terry and captured his two children a little boy and a little girl. The girl's name was Mattie and the boy's name was Joe. But Joe had fought them so hard they knocked him in the head and left him for dead, right before his little sister's eyes. But he didn't die. Well, we rode all night that night till daylight. [?] daylight we took up the trail again and overtaken them just before noon. They didn't offer to fight for it was raining and their bow strings were wet. They couldn't shoot and that gave us the best of them. One old

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Indian was off ahead of the others and they were crossing a creek when we begin to shoot at them. We followed them on into a shin-oak thicket. After awhile we come into a little opening and just as we got to this opening we saw the little girl. It looked like she had just been kicked off of the horse by the old Indian she was riding behind. She had an Indian blanket wrapped around her and when she saw us she started to run. But we told 7 her to wait, we wouldn't hurt her, so she sat down on the blanket and waited. We went on after the Indians, still shooting at them every chance we got. Finally , we got so close to the old Indian that had dropped the little girl that we could see him kick his horse every jump trying to make him go faster. Anyway, he had a bed tick around him and and we found that full of bullet holes and bloody. I don't know if we killed any or not but there was plenty of blood along the trail. He ran on till he got to a ridge and when he went over this ridge and into another thicket, we was close enough to see he [?] long lance in his hand. None of us wanted him bad enough to go in there after him, for you know they can throw those old lances through you.

"We got the little girl and started back home. On the way back we found a lot of stuff the Indians had lost, such as goat hides and one buffalo robe. It was cold and everything was wet. So we picked them up and took them to camp and used them for bedding. Just before night someone said, 'Do you suppose these things have lice?' But we slept on them just the same. Yes, we got plenty lice. When we got back to Old Man Shores' where we were in cow camp, we took a big wash pot, got off down on the river and cleaned up. We boiled all our clothes and tied the buffalo robe in the river for about three days. Jim Avant took the little girl on to his home, but he had to stay in camp with the rest till he got rid of those lice. Mrs. Avant took the little girl and combed and washed the lice out of her hair, and washed the paint off of her face that the Indians had put on it. And she put clean clothes on her.

"Every [?] in the whole country wanted the little girl, but she didn't want to stay with any of them. She wanted to stay with us men who had rescued her from the Indians. When they did take her back to 8 her mother, she went with a herd of fat cattle that Pruitt was taking to San Antonio. When they got to San Antonio, she wouldn't get on the stage coach to go

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home unless one of the cowboys went along, so one of them got on the coach up with the driver and put the little girl back inside with the mail. There was a little window in the top where she could see the cowboy sitting up on top. Well, when they got down the road a piece, they picked up another passenger/ so the cowboy slipped off and this man took his place. The little girl didn't know the difference. But I never saw her after that.

"I knew Billy the Kid. He stayed in camp with us down here about Hackberry once for about a week. He rode into camp one day and his horse was rode down. He told us his name was Word and he wanted to stay a few days. I told him all right. So he stayed on and helped us round up cattle till one day he got into a fight with a Negro we had working with the outfit. Billy cut the Negro across the side of the face and down the back with a long butcher knife. The Negro finally run. And when he stopped, I walked over to where he was and he said, 'Mr. Jack, please don't let him hurt me any more!' About that time Billy came up and said, 'Oh, shut your damn mouth. I have already done all to you that I want to.' Billy stood there and wiped the blood off of the knife with his hands and looked at the cut on the Nigger as unconcerned as if he hadn't done a thing. But he left after that. He was afraid the officers would hear of this and would get him for other things he was wanted for.

"When he left camp he went on up to Bill Patterson's ranch and got a job going up the trail to Kansas that spring. They said he stayed with them part of the way back home, but stopped one day away out on the prairie and took his bed but turned his horse aloose. So they left him right there without a horse. They said they guessed he didn't want 9 to get any closer to Texas.

"I knew several other desperados. Among them was Bill Longley, George Gladden, John Beard and Lew Sawyers. They all come through this / country one winter at different times. They didn't do any kind of work while they was here but they took in all the dances.

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"There was one man, a desperado, come in to this country one time. I can't remember his name right now. Anyway , he stayed over on the West Prong a lot. I don't know what he had done, no telling what. Anyway, while he was staying up on the West Prong, he shot a Mexican one day just to try out his gun. The Mexican was about two-hundred and fifty yards away and as he stooped over to dig a hole this man shot him in the hip. I met the man about a mile down the road just after it had happened but he didn't say a word about what he had done. Well, the rangers come in and got after him and caught him away from home without a horse. But he got away from them and Old Man Lyman Smith helped him get out of the country by exchanging clothes with him so he would be disguised and wouldn't get caught. Those fellows were very peaceful and nice unless trouble come up.

"I was married to Miss Jennie Horton in January 1888. We were married right up the river here about a half-mile in my wife's parent's home. [?] walked on down here after the wedding and have been here ever since. But I had to give a dance at Leakey in the court house that night to keep the boys from shivareeing us. We had a big supper and danced till about four o'clock, then it came up a big, snow storm and we had to go home to keep from freezing. It was one of the biggest snow storms I ever saw in this country. I guess me getting married caused it.

"This past year, on January 12, we celebrated our golden wedding anniversary with a dinner at our home. Our son, Guy, and two grand 10 daughters, Mrs. Taylor and Mrs. Elms, and a few of our close friends came. We received many nice and useful gifts.

"I don't ride any more because I can't get on my horse. I haven't rode now in about three years. My wife did all the riding up till about a year ago, then Guy came back home to live, so he does the riding for us now."